183941 - Is it acceptable to say that Allah is beyond place and time?

the question

is it true that we must believe that Allah is beyond place and time? Because I read this question on a website, and I looked for the answer to it, but I did not find any answer apart from the response of al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him), who was refuting the Ahbaash, who deny the divine attribute of exaltedness. I – praise be to Allah – affirm that Allah is above His Throne, but I do not understand what is meant by the idea that Allah is beyond place and time. What is required of me as a Muslim, because the Shaytaan has started to confuse me about my belief, and to tell me that I have become a disbeliever, Allah forbid? I am afraid that Allah will punish me, and I am afraid that I may believe something that is not true.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Saying that Allah, may He be exalted, is beyond place and time is not correct for two reasons:

i. It is something that is not narrated in the Sunnah and is not known in the words of the earlier generations.

ii. It is something that may lead to invalid ideas. Most of those who use affirm this phrase and repeat it intend thereby to deny that Allah, may He be exalted, is above His creation and that He rose above His Throne and is above the heaven.

Undoubtedly denying the exaltedness of Allah and that He is above His creation is a false belief. It is one of the main issues in which the Jahamis differ from Ahl as-Sunnah. The Salaf refuted this misguided notion and affirmed that believing in this idea constitutes disbelief in the Lord of the Worlds, and is contrary to what was mentioned in sound religious texts that reach the level of

being mutawaatir [i.e., narrated by so many from so many at each stage of the chain of narration that it is inconceivable that they could all have agreed upon a lie] and contrary to the consensus of the early generations. It is also contrary to common sense and to the dictates of sound human nature.

Secondly:

Even though this phrase is quoted in support of a false notion, there is nothing wrong with asking the one who says it about what he means thereby, so that we may explain to him what there is of sound ideas in what he is trying to prove, or whether there is some unsound or innovated idea that is to be rejected, whilst noting that it is not permissible to use such phrases that could cause one to develop wrong notions with regard to Allah, may He be exalted.

So if he says: We declare Allah to be beyond place, we say to him: What do you mean by this?

If he says: I mean that nothing of His creation can encompass Allah, may He be exalted,

We say to him: This is valid, and we agree with you, because how could anything of His creation encompass Allah, Who is the First and the Last, the Most High and the Most Near? Rather the Lord, may He be exalted, is mightier and greater than all created things; His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth.

Al-Bukhaari (4812) and Muslim (2787) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: “Allah, may He be blessed and exalted, will take hold of the earth and will roll up the heavens in His right Hand, then He will say: ‘I am the Sovereign, where are the kings of the earth?’”

If he says: I know that, but what I mean by place is what lies beyond this universe of exaltedness, then he is in fact denying the exaltedness of Allah and His being above His creation.

It should be said to him: This is an invalid meaning that is contrary to common sense and to the soundly narrated reports.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If what he means by saying that Allah is beyond place is that no place could encompass Him – may He be glorified and exalted – then this is correct, for nothing of His creation can encompass Allah, may He be exalted; He is too great and too exalted to be encompassed by anything. How can it be otherwise, when “the earth entirely will be [within] His grip on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His right hand” [az-Zumar 39:67]?

But if what he intends when saying that Allah is beyond place is to deny the exaltedness of Allah, then this is not correct; rather it is false according to the evidence of the Qur’an and Sunnah, the consensus of the early generations, reason and sound common sense.

It is proven from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he said to the slave woman: “Where is Allah?” She said: Up above (meaning above the heaven). He said to her master: “Manumit her, for she is a believing woman.” Narrated by Muslim (537).

Everyone who calls upon Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, can only think of Him being on high. This is instinctive to the human nature (fitrah) that Allah has instilled in people. No one thinks otherwise except one whom the devils have confused. You will not find anyone whose nature is sound calling upon Allah and thinking of Him as being to the right or to the left or down below, or any other direction. Rather he will only think of Him as being up above.

End quote from Majmoo‘ Fataawa wa Rasaa’il Ibn ‘Uthaymeen (1/196-197).

If what he means by saying that is that Allah is everywhere, because no one place could encompass Him, this is also false. In fact it is among the falsest of notions. The scholars of the Committee said:

The one who says that Allah is everywhere, in Himself and His Essence, is wrong; he is a believer in hulool (incarnation) and a kaafir (disbeliever). The one who says that Allah is everywhere By His knowledge, and not in His essence, is correct.

End quote from Fataawa al-Lajnah ad-Daa’imah – vol. 1 (2/38).

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his poem an-Nooniyyah (295):

The Lord is above the Throne and the Kursi; that is common sense which is instilled in all people.

Do not limit Him to one place by saying, “Our Lord is everywhere.”

In your ignorance you suggest that He is not above His Throne, then you try to limit Him by saying that He is in some other place.

Do not suggest that He does not exist by saying that He is not in the universe or outside it.

See also the answers to questions no. 11035 and 124469

Thirdly:

Similar to that is the suggestion that Allah, may He be exalted, is beyond time. This is also not known from the early generations, and it is essential to ask the one who says that what he means thereby.

If he says: I mean that Allah, may He be exalted, existed before all things, and will exist after all things, we say to him: This is correct and we agree with you.

One of the supplications (du‘aa’s) of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him was that which was narrated by Muslim (2713): “Allaahumma anta al-awwal fa laysa qablaka shay’un, wa anta al-aakhir fa laysa ba’daka shay’un, wa anta al-zaahir fa laysa fawqaka shay’un, wa anta al-baatin fa laysa doonaka shay’un … (O Allah, You are the First and there is nothing before You, You are the Last and there is nothing after You, You are the Most High and there is nothing above You, and You are the Most Near and there is nothing closer than You…).”

Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The First (al-Awwal) and az-Zaahir (the Most High) are both attributes which belong to Allah alone, may He be glorified, for He is the One Who existed before all things and will exist after all things, may He be glorified and exalted. He is the Most High, above all of His creation, and will abide after

they cease to be.

End quote from Majmoo‘ Fataawa Ibn Baaz (7/292).

If he says: What I mean is to deny the divine attributes that have to do with time, which are those that have to do with divine actions or deeds, such as rising, descending, smiling, being pleased and being angry, and other actions that have to do with His will, so that He does them when and if He wills, and He does not do them when and if He wills, and this person denies that and claims that Allah is beyond time,

We say to him: This is an incorrect and false argument, and we do not agree with you, because Ahl as-Sunnah are unanimously agreed on affirming that the Lord, may He be exalted, descends during the last third of the night, as is proven in the religious texts, in a manner that befits Him, may He be glorified. Similarly, they applied this notion to all other similar attributes (that have to do with divine actions).

What you must do is refrain from opening the door to doubts and insinuating thoughts. So long as Allah has blessed you by guiding you to sound belief, then you should focus on learning from the well-known books and scholars of Ahl as-Sunnah, both classical and modern, such as the books of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn al-Qayyim; the books of Shaykh al-Islam Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhaab; and the books of leading callers to Islam such as Shaykh Ibn Baaz and Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen. We also advise you to read the series on ‘Aqeedah in the Light of the Qur’an and Sunnah by Shaykh ‘Umar Sulaymaan al-Ashqar (may Allah have mercy on him) [series of 8 volumes available in English from International Islamic Publishing House (IIPH), Riyadh]. You should also seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shaytaan and ask Allah to protect you from him and to make you steadfast in adhering to Islam and to the way of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa‘ah, and you should fear Allah both in private and in public. Then the Shaytaan will not be able to overwhelm you with his whispers and doubts, by Allah’s mercy.

For more information, please see the answers to questions no. 12315 and 39684.

And Allah knows best.